

Our experience of Claude Monet's *Waterloo Bridge, Veiled Sun* changes according to the distance from which it is viewed. This early 20th century Impressionist oil painting features the bridge spanning the River Thames. Impressionist artists strived to capture the fleeting quality of light on a landscape, and Monet, in particular, painted the same scene at different times of day, and under different climatic conditions. *Waterloo Bridge, Veiled Sun* is one painting in such a series. It measures 25 inches high by 39 inches wide, and was completed in 1903.

From across the room, the cityscape portrayed in this painting is immediately clear. In the middle ground of the painting, the masonry bridge crosses the river on a diagonal from left to right. There is activity on the bridge, but it is difficult to distinguish details. At a distance in the background behind the bridge, nearly masked by the purple haze of the sky, we see buildings and several smokestacks. The overall color is a muted lavender.

At a distance of eight feet from the painting, the scene begins to lose clarity. In the foreground, the choppy surface of the river is suggested by small lightly textured brush strokes painted in a variety of colors. The river occupies the entire foreground and extends to our left under the arches of the bridge. No shoreline is visible on the left side of the painting. The bridge spans the middle of the painting and is slightly angled upward from the left to the right. It is a low-lying masonry construction, with five arches spanning the river; the fifth is only partially visible at the right side of the canvas. The bridge's sturdy structural supports are decorated with double columns. The bridge stands out in the lavender mist with yellow highlights and tan accents. While details on the bridge are not drawn in a realistic manner, we sense that it is crowded, with a parade of pedestrians and carriages of the period spanning its length.

On the opposite river bank, beyond the bridge, we notice four brownish smokestacks topped with wisps of smoke. In the center of the painting, one smokestack stands out. It is thicker than the others and has a small yellowish-colored square near the top. These smokestacks are all attached to factory buildings built on the edge of the river.

As we move even closer and stand about one to two feet from the painting, details of the painting practically dissolve into simple brushstrokes of color. The water becomes various shades of lavender, green, and cream. While you can still see the definition of the arches, the bridge largely turns into flecks of dark purple, lavender, yellow, and orange. The background melts into various shades of purple, pink, and lavender.

Claude Monet painted Waterloo Bridge multiple times during and after a visit to London in 1901. Set in an ornate, gold frame, Claude Monet's signature and the date, 1903, are painted prominently in black in the lower right corner of the painting. *Waterloo Bridge, Veiled Sun* was a gift to the museum from the estate of Emily and James Sibley Watson.

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